



A BLOG BY
KARL VATERS

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CHURCH LEADERSHIP

Five Simple Steps to Mentor New Believers (Without Overworking the Pastor)

Small churches can use our personal touch to help new believers grow in the way that suits them best.

by Karl Vaters

August 28, 2015



My church doesn't use a discipleship curriculum.

Instead, as I wrote about in my previous two posts, we mentor people.

[*Serious About Discipleship? Mentoring Is Better Than Curriculum*](#)

[*Mentoring Is Better than Curriculum: Seven Steps to Better Discipleship*](#)

Those posts were about helping believers become leaders. But what do we do before that?

Mentoring works for new believers, too.

You don't need an expensive, staff-heavy curriculum to do great follow-up with new believers.

If you're not happy with your small church's discipleship program (or it may not even exist), I have some good news. You don't need an expensive, staff-heavy curriculum to do great follow-up with new believers. And it doesn't need to kill your already-over-busy schedule either.

After a few hit-and-miss attempts, our church has discovered a simple five-step process that can work for any small church. And it looks suspiciously similar to what Jesus, Paul and many other early church leaders did.

1. Meet With Every New Believer

Pastors of big churches can't do this. That's not a slam on them, it's just the way it is.

But it does point out one of the advantages of pastoring a small church – the personal touch.

2. Determine How They Learn and Grow

I recently met with a new believer who had no Bible knowledge whatsoever.

After a short interview, I determined that the best way for him to start growing in his newfound faith was to read the Gospel of John. I told him to start by reading one chapter a day, then chew on it. If he wanted to re-read the same chapter the next day, do that until he was ready to move to the following chapter.

When I checked in with him on a Sunday morning about 10 days later, he was only on John 5. "I sat with John 3 for a few days", he told me, with great joy. "That conversation Jesus had with Nicodemus was fantastic!"

I smiled. He was getting it. God's Word was doing its work.

Since then, he and I catch up regularly. He read through Acts the same way. Now he's moving slowly through Romans. I answer questions when he needs help.

I've never met anyone else for whom I'd recommend that style of discipleship. But it's the best way for him, for now.

People learn and grow in different ways. Let's use the personal touch that we get from being in a small church to help people in the way that suits them best.

If you're wondering how the interview works, it's simple. I ask about the following:

What was their family like, growing up?

How did they like school?

Do they like to read?

Are they a hands-on learner?

Are they relationship-oriented?

What do they do in their spare time?

What was their best learning experience in the past?

Their worst?

Who was their favorite teacher and why?

Simply put, I get nosy until I feel like I have a handle on things.

Then I suggest an idea or two and ask if that sounds like something that might work for them. I also give them a guilt-free out. If the selected style of learning doesn't work for them, they can come to me at any time and we'll find another way to get it done.

3. Connect Them With a Mature Believer and the Right Resources

Right now there are a handful of new believers in our church who meet regularly with mature believers to learn, grow and be disciplined. Each one of them does it differently, depending on their circumstance.

One of those discipleship/mentoring relationships is between two people who enjoy book clubs. So I recommend a good Christian book for them to read, then they meet once a week to talk about it. Every few weeks I take a moment after the Sunday service to hear how they're doing. When they finish reading one book, I recommend the next one. They're both growing in their relationships with Jesus and each other.

4. Help Them Plug Into An Active Ministry That Utilizes Their Gifts

We fill people's heads with Bible knowledge, but we wait too long to activate that knowledge within real-world ministry.

This is the most-neglected step of most new believer programs. We fill people's heads with Bible knowledge, but we wait too long to activate that knowledge within real-world ministry. That is dangerous. For the believer and the church.

The longer I pastor, the more convinced I am that one of the main reasons for pastoral stress is church members with a lot of Bible knowledge and/or pew time who are doing little, if any, practical, hands-on, outside-the-church-walls ministry.

The Apostle Paul taught us that, "*knowledge puffs up, but love builds up*" (1 Cor 8:1). That's what happens when we cram bible knowledge into people's heads without helping them activate it with their hands and feet.

It's never the new believers that burn out the pastor. It's the pew-warmers who think they know how to run the church, but never lift a finger to help. Then they leave because they're "not being fed".

The best solution to that? Teach people from the very start of their faith how to pick up a spoon and feed themselves!

5. As People Mature, Call On Them to Start Leading Others

Discipleship is never finished. Even the most mature believer has something to learn.

The best way for a mature believer to keep learning is to teach others as they do ministry together.

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Start With One

One of the great side benefits of these steps is how little time it takes from the pastor's schedule. Instead of putting in endless hours of discipleship myself (though I still do some of it) I often hear about great results after-the-fact.

I recommend starting with one person. That's what I did. I walked a new believer through the early stages of discipleship myself, including letting them know that they'd be doing this themselves some day. Then, when another new believer came along, I showed them how to adapt what we'd done with this new believer.

Believers discipling believers.

Our churches don't need a program, a curriculum, a classroom or a certified teacher. We just need to do it.

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